

REF. DOC. #1037

THE FOREIGN OFFICE SPOKE^SMAN MADE PUBLIC ON THE 28TH DECEMBER,
1937, THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES
CONCERNING THE SINKING OF THE BRITISH
MEN-OF-WAR AT WUHU.

Regarding the incident of shelling British men-of-war, it is regrettable that, despite earnest endeavours to find out real fact of the case, the investigation has been delayed on account of various troops having been scattered at the time and the consequent difficulty of establishing contact through lack of the means of communication. Immediately after the occurrence of the incident, the Army authorities despatched a staff officer of the Army Department of the Imperial Headquarters to carry on joint investigations on the spot with the authorities concerned there. The result so far obtained is as follows:

I. GENERAL SITUATION.

1. On December 11, the Japanese forces, in order to win the final victory after the fighting of more than a hundred days, closed in on the capital of China, Nanking, and having completed their frontal siege on land, they were vying with one another for the capture of its walls. Heavy fires broke out in the city, especially in the direction of Sialwan and dense smoke overhung the Yangtze River.

DEF. DOC. #1037

On that day the Detachment X crossed the Yangtze to its left bank at a point north of Taiping, and advanced toward Fuhow in order to intercept the Chinese forces retreating from Nanking.

Simultaneously the high commander and all his men of the Japanese force which had advanced close to the first line (to Siaomihang Will to the south of Wuhuatai) assuming that the only way open for the retreat of the hard-pressed enemy at Nanking would be by the river Yangtze, were all concentrating their attention on that direction. and in view of the fact that notice had already been served on the 9th December by the Japanese Consul General at Shanghai to the authorities of other Powers requesting the evacuation of their nationals from the zone of hostilities and that fighting had become so intense as above described, they did not even dream of the presence of any foreign vessels in the neighbourhood of the fighting area.

2. However, about 3:00 o'clock (Japan Time) on the afternoon of the same day more than ten large steamers were observed fleeing up the river from the direction of Siaokwan. The said high commander, believing them to be the enemy in retreat, ordered the artillery corps nearby to fire on the ships. But the distance being too great, the shells did not reach the ships which continued their way upstream to the chagrin of all the Japanese soldiers.

Thereupon, the high commander sent orders to the units which were expected to be in the neighbourhood of Wuhu to attack these vessels.

DEF. DOC. #1037

II. THE ACTIONS OF THE DETACHMENT Z.

1. The Detachment Z, which was ordered to intercept the enemy's retreat, made a forced march through the night of the 11th and reached the neighbourhood of Wuhu between 7:30 and 8:20 o'clock on the morning of the 12th and occupied positions there.

On that day the weather was fine but there was dense fog from the morning. After a while the commander of the detachment discovered along the right bank of the Yangtze at a point about three kilometres to the north from his position four large steamers anchored, which appeared to be landing men by launches. Then, at about 9:00 o'clock he noticed some of these steamers suddenly begin sending up black smoke, whereupon the commander, deciding that the enemy was trying to hide behind smoke screen his sinister plan, ordered firing. Shells were seen striking the first and the second ships in the fore-front. However, the ships in the rear immediately fled downstream and vanished soon out of sight, while one of the ships at the front began to advance toward our forces. As she came nearer, a British flag on her was recognized. The commander of the detachment immediately ordered to cease firing. When the ship came along the pier at Wuhu, it was discovered that she was a British man-of-war, the Ladybird.

2. At about 10:00 o'clock one shell was fired by mistake at a ship hoisting the British flag which was coming from the upper stream, but it seemed to have passed high over the vessel. This ship, when arrived at the pier, was identified as the British man-of-war, the Bee.

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DFP. DOC. #1037

3. Rear-Admiral Holt who was aboard the Fox, the British Consul who was aboard the Ladybird, and several officers including captains of the ships landed and met the commander of the detachment.

At this meeting, the commander of the detachment said that as the British flag could not be discerned on account of the fog and as the ships were hidden behind a black smoke, he had believed the vessels to be enemy vessels. Furthermore, he stated, after explaining the circumstance regarding large numbers of defeated Chinese soldiers in the neighbourhood of Wuhu at that time who were using the Yangtze for their retreat, he stated that it was the duty of his detachment to sink all enemy vessels on the river. The British thereupon requested the commander not to fire upon them thereafter, to which the commander agreed.

Then the British expressed their desire that, in order to forestall further danger, Japanese officers be put on board the British ships, but the commander declined to accede to this. At the request of the British, a Japanese captain was ordered to go on board the British man-of-war for the purpose of inspecting the neighbourhood. He saw behind a delta about eight kilometres down the stream six steamers and many junks loaded full of Europeans and Americans.

The commander of the detachment apologized for the casualties caused aboard the British man-of-war, lent some of his coolies for the handling of the dead and wounded, and sent as his proxies an infantry officer and an artillery officer to honour the British

Ref Doc No. 1057

dead at the funeral.

The British men-of-war stayed at the pier until about noon and then departed.

III. CONCLUSION.

As has been described above, it was not even dreamed of, not only by the high commander on the spot but by all the units on the first line, that there might be any vessels of third Powers in the dangerous fighting area and at the time of severe battles, when, as a matter of fact, with a part of the Japanese forces already at Pukow across the Yangtze, the possible path of retreat for the Chinese forces was limited only to the Yangtze River.

Contrary to the judgment of our forces, the facts were that there were British ships in the fighting area. These ships not only could not be recognized as British on account of the dense fog but seemed to be landing retreating Chinese on the shore; moreover the movements of the ships were such as to make them appear to be trying to hide behind a smoke screen. In these circumstances the commander of the detachment issued order to fire at the vessels. The attack, therefore, was not made at all in the knowledge that the vessels were of British nationality. That the firing was entirely unintentional will be understood by those who know the actual conditions in a battle-field where occurrences of unexpected and extraordinary events are so numerous. All these circumstances notwithstanding, we sincerely regret that there should have taken place the present unfortunate affair.

100-1037

C E R T I F I C A T E

Statement of Source and Authenticity

I, Hayashi, Kaoru, Chief of the Archives Section, Japanese Foreign Office, hereby certify that the document hereto attached in English consisting of 5 pages and entitled "The Foreign Office Spokesman made public on the 28th December, 1937, the following Statement of the Military Authorities concerning the Shelling of the British War-Ship at Wuhu." is an exact and true copy of an official document of the Japanese Foreign Office.

Certified at Tokyo,
on this 5th day of April, 1947.

/s/ K. Hayashi
Signature of Official

Witness: /s/ K. Urabe

燕湖ニ於ケル英艦砲撃事件ニ關スル陸軍當局ノ下記詳誌
昭和十二年十二月二十八日外務省情報部長ニヨリ公表サル

燕湖附近ニ於ケル英艦砲撃事件ニ關シテハ銳意真相調査ニ努メタルモ當時部隊各所ニ分散シ通信連絡亦意ノ如クナラサリシタメ之カ調査延滞セシハ遺憾ナリ當局ハ事件發生後直チニ大本營陸軍部參謀ヲ派遣シ現地偵察ト協力調査ノ結果知リ得タル所左ノ如シ。

一、一般ノ情況

一、十二月十一日皇軍ハ征戰百日ノ成果ヲ此一舉ニ收ムヘク、長驅敵首都南京ニ近迫シ、既ニ敵正面ノ包圍ヲ完成シ諸隊奮進シテ淞滬ノ奪取ヲ成ヒ、市街特ニ下關方面ハ兵火熾シニ起リ黒煙江上ヲ蓋フ。
○支隊ハ此日太平府北方ニ於テ楊子江左岸ニ渡河シ浦口方面ニ前進シテ南京ニ在ル敵ノ最後ノ退路ヲ遮斷セントセリ。
當時第一線ニ近ク（雨花臺南方小不行高地）進出シテ戰鬪ヲ指揮シアリシ高級指揮官以下何レモ南京ニ窮乏セル敵ノ唯一ノ退路ハ既ニ唯楊子江ノミナルヘキヲ察シ之ニ對シ注意ヲ集中シアリタリ、而シテ十二

月九日列國ニ對シテハ我上海總領事ヨリ、交戦地域外ニ移動セラレタキ旨ノ通告ヲ傳達シアリ而モ戰況新ノ如ク切迫セル時、外國艦船カ尙此附近海域ニ存在スヘシトハ全ク夢想タニセサリシ所ナリ。

二、然ルニ午後三時（日本時間、以下同シ）頃果然十數隻ノ大型汽船下陸方面ヨリ無煙ヲ吐キテ上流ニ進定スルヲ認メ高威海官ハ必然敵ノ退却ト認メ直ニ附近ノ砲兵部隊ヲシテ射撃セシム然ルニ距離短縮ニシテ砲撃着達セス敵船ハ怒々トシテ進行ヲ繼ケ艦ル者皆切首視ルセリ。直ニ於テ高威海官ハ直ニ當時無敵附近ニ在リト報知セラレタル部隊ニ對シ之等船泊ノ覆滅ヲ命ス。

二、〇〇文隊行動

一、敵ノ退却避走ヲ命セラレタル〇〇文隊ハ十一日夜行軍ヲ以テ南行シ十二日午前七時三十分乃至八時二十分ノ間ニ蕪湖附近ニ到着シテ陣地ヲ占領セリ。

コノ日朝來晴天ナルモ、霧深シ細テ文隊長ハ、陣地ノ北方約三料橋子

江右岸ニ四偏ノ大型汽船碇泊セルヲ認メ、且「ランヂ」ヲ以テ人員ヲ上陸セシメアルカ如キ行動ヲ見ル、斯クスル内（午前九時頃此等汽船ノ一部假ニ急煙ヲ吐キ出シタルヲ以テ支隊長ハ敵カ急進煙幕ニヨリ企圖ヲ秘匿セントスルモノト判斷シ射撃ヲ命ス彈丸ハ、先頭及ヒ第二ノ汽船ニ命中スルヲ認メシカ、後方ニ在リシ船ハ直チニ下流方向ニ退却シテ影ヲ没シ、先頭ニ在リシ一隻ハ我方ニ向ヒ前進シ來リ、近接スルニ從ヒ英勳旗ヲ認メシヲ以テ支隊長ハ直ニ射撃ヲ中止セシメタリ、敵船無補機銃ニ接著スルニ及ビ之英國軍艦「レデイ。バード」號ナルコトヲ知レリ。

二、午前十時頃英勳旗ヲ掲クル一船上流ヨリ接近シ來レル時一彈ヲ誤發セシモ彈丸ハ高ク船上ヲ飛越シタルモノノ如シ。

敵船モ同シク後方ニ接著セシカ之英國「ビー」號ナリキ。

三、「ビー」號ニ坐乗セル「ホルツ」少將「レデイ。バード」號ニ在リシ英國領事ソノ他艦長士官等數名ハ上陸シ支隊長ト會見ス。

支隊長ハ「朝霧ノタメ英國旗ヲ見ルコト能ハス且無煙ニテ進發セルヲ以テコレヲ敵艦ト思惟セリ」ト答ヘ且當時無潮附近ニ支那ノ敗殘兵多ク、コレヲカ撈子江ヲ利用シアル所流ヲ説明シ支隊ハ撈子江上ノ敵船艦ハ悉ク擊沈スヘキ任務ヲ有スル旨ヲ述ヘタリ。

英國側ハ情況ノ判明スルヤ爾後態度ヲ柔ラケ、爾後射撃セサル如ク要求セシヲ以テ支隊長之ヲ承認ス。

英國側ハ今後ノ危險ヲ豫防スルタメ我士官兵ヲ乗船セシムル豫望セシモ支隊長ハ已ニ英艦ナルコト明瞭ナルニ就キ其必要ナカルヘシト主張セリ然レトモ英艦側ノ希望ニ從ヒ一六尉ヲ英艦ニ搭乗セシメテ觀察ニ赴カシメタルニ、下流約八キロ附近中洲ノ處ニ汽船六隻、多量ノ「ジャンク」アリ、歐米人ヲ交ヘ支那人ヲ捕縛セルヲ見タリ支隊長ハ英艦ノ死傷者ニ對シ遺憾ノ意ヲ表スルト共ニ之カ處置ノタメ苦力ヲ貸與シ且歩、砲兵將校各一ヲ代表トシテ會談セシメタリ。

英艦ハ正午頃迄任務ニ在リシカ後出航セリ。

三、結 言

被上ノ如ク南京ハ包圍セラレ我軍ノ一部ハ既ニ對岸浦口ニ在リ戰況甚メテ切迫シ支那軍ノ退却カ僅カニ楊子江ノミニ限定セラレアリシ當時現地高司令官ハ勿論第一線部隊ニ至ル迄此危險ナル交戦區域ニハ第三國艦船ノ存在スルカ如キコトハ全然夢想タニセザリシ所ナリ。

然ルニ事實ノ情況ハ我方ノ報告ト相違シテ英艦船ハ戰場内ニ介在シタルモ被上ノタメ英艦船タルヲ識別シ得ス而モ退却セル以テ江岸ニ上陸スルカ如キ状況ヲ呈シ且煙幕ニヨリ其行動ヲ秘匿スルカ如キ状況ナリシヲ以テ支隊長カ射撃ヲ命スルニ至リシモノニシテ斷シテ出先ニ於ケル感情ニヨリ英艦船ト知リツツ射撃セルモノニアラス又此間焉モ故意乃至恫嚇ノ行爲ト認ムヘキ事庄ナキハ見ク被上ノ多キ戦場ノ實相ヲ理解スルモノノ首肯シ得ル所ナルヘシ、然レトモソノ結果ニオイト不幸ナル今次事件ノ志記ヲ見ルニ至リシハ洵ニ遺憾トスル所ナリ。

文書ノ出所並ニ成立ニ關スル證明書

目分、林 毅 ハ外務省文書課長ノ職ニ居ル者ナル處、茲ニ添付セラレタル日本語ニ依ツテ書カレ五頁ヨリ成ル英譯電報事件ニ關スル大本營陸軍部發表（昭和十二年十二月二十八日）ト題スル營報ハ日本陸府（外務省）ノ保管ニ係ル公文書ノ正確ニシテ眞實ナル爲シナルコトヲ證明ス

昭和二十二年四月五日

於東京

林

毅

右署名捺印ハ目分ノ面前ニ於テ爲サレタリ

同日 於 同所

立會人 浦 部 勝 局